



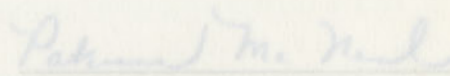
Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University at South Bend, in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Liberal Studies.

Femme Natale:
Poetry of Woman


Tom Vander Ven, Ph.D.
(Project Advisor)

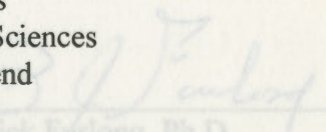
Beth J. Rudnick


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(Committee Chair)

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
the Master of Liberal Studies
in the Division of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Indiana University at South Bend

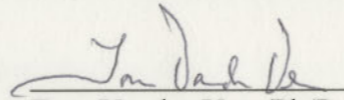
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Patrick Furlong, Ph.D.
(Program Director)

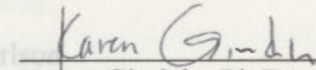
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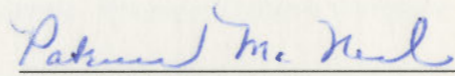
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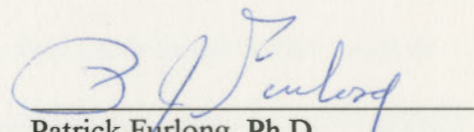
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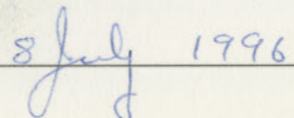
Without the encouragement and patience of
Dr. Tom Vander Ven, Dr. Karen Gindele, Dr. Patricia McNeal,
and Ms. Shirley Carlisle
the voices of the women herein would have remained silent.


Karen Gindele, Ph.D.


Patricia McNeal, Ph.D.
(Committee Chair)


Patrick Furlong, Ph.D.
(Program Director)

Date of Oral Examination:


8 July 1996

This collection is dedicated with love to
Without the encouragement and patience of
Denise Martine, Michael Szymanski, Nancy Bowen, Sharon Starr,
Dr. Tom Vander Ven, Dr. Karen Gindele, Dr. Patricia McNeal,
Nancy Louise Cheney,
and Ms. Shirley Carlson
the voices of the women herein would have remained silent.

Introduction

This collection of poetry portrays real women, imagined women, women I know or have met and women I have only observed distantly but sympathetically in women-frequented and women-dominated events and places. My experience tells

This collection is dedicated with love to
Denise Martine, Michael Szymanski, Nancy Howell, Sharon Starr,
responses.

Nancy Louise Cheney,

Because of these similarities among women, one woman--whether real or a characterization (or composite)--can stand as a symbol of many women. In my poetry, I have used a recurring first person narrative as I tried to convey that commonality through my own voice and experience. Because I believe women's experiences and responses are so shared despite economic differences, marital differences, and the like, I have narrated some experiences I have not had but for which I have empathy, such as marriage, divorce, and, in one instance, Sylvia Plath's suicide. Or I have created characters, most often based on fact, such as Ruby, Deanna, and "my mother," who have assumed that symbolic status through what is a brief glimpse into some elemental aspect of life.

What I want most is for women to read my work and feel a sense of community. Women rely on this kind of social community as a source of strength and relief in an economic and political atmosphere that has traditionally denied

Introduction

This collection of poetry portrays real women, imagined women, women I know or have met and women I have only observed distantly but sympathetically in women-frequented and women-dominated events and places. My experience tells me that women generally share not only common lifestyles but also common responses.

Because of these similarities among women, one woman--whether real or a characterization (or composite)--can stand as a symbol of many women. In my poetry, I have used a recurring first person narrative as I tried to convey that commonality through my own voice and experience. Because I believe women's experiences and responses are so shared despite economic differences, marital differences, and the like, I have narrated some experiences I have not had but for which I have empathy, such as marriage, divorce, and, in one instance, Sylvia Plath's suicide. Or I have created characters, most often based on fact, such as Ruby, Deanna, and "my mother," who have assumed that symbolic status through what is a brief glimpse into some elemental aspect of life.

What I want most is for women to read my work and feel a sense of community. Women rely on this kind of social community as a source of strength and relief in an economic and political atmosphere that has traditionally denied

them other expressions of strength, support and validation. In many respects, women have invented themselves through dialogue. I believe (re)creating women characters and narrating personal experience for readers can encourage this ongoing and necessary conversation, and in this collection I sincerely hope I have accomplished this.

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By Hand

Right here I sit, wondering
if I can be made
by my hand alone, staring at the
screen that has followed orders
and strung out words
which should make me memorable:
universal truths, and constants,
and timeless rhythms.
I lose my place.
I am, all in all, just a woman
with a real job and dirty clothes.
I hear the enduring hum of the dryer, of buttons
banging their heads against
the tumblers like hail
in spring heat; I see women
at laundromats, soaking their
make-believe silks by hand
with kitchen towels and bath rags;
I see women on doorsteps, still
feeling the soggy lips that pressed
them and the wrong answers that reeled in their minds
turning over for hours, hours, and hours
after, rehearsals in bathroom mirrors
and the practiced lines
that never made it to the press.

I hear them humming through
their lipstick and expectations.
My permanent presses are turning.
I think of the smoothing and the folding
and the ironing out to be done.
And the putting away.
I wonder if I can stand out
from all of this
though the arid words I choose
so often lie flat upon the screen.
I imagine myself at the keyboard,
Control-I to shift a line
that doesn't do its work
without prodding, shaking out
prepositions that hang wrong.

I try, I try, and try,
but all I see is a woman,
shaking out her make-believe silks;
I see in tenements a woman hanging
with the finest care
her quilts on a clothesline
that ends in her neighbor's mouth;
I see in Prague, walking the streets,
a woman in a woolen dress,
the smart lines of her suit
pointing the way to work;
I see in Mexico a woman,
her flamenco skirt spreading
wide in her own wind

as she twirls with her sisters
for the coins that pay
for the threads that make
the skirts that hold
their act together.

Right here I sit, knowing
I cannot be made
by my hand alone. I know
the threads that keep my act
together
and I am, by them,
secured.

in the blueness of that morning
heaved up words in the wash of gray
with fingers crawling you
penned in by the fragile light
all the gaps and strains and stress
and marked yourself forever within
the open space of dawn.

I envy you I find

I creep out in your crawl space.

To Plath

The Belle Jarred

There was no moonlight.

In that singular morning,
you turned yourself out
from the hollows you did
in one cold day break
from all that you created.

And I envy you.
Your passage booked you
in the blueness of that morning
heaved up words in the wash of gray
with fingers crawling you
penned in by the fragile light
all the gaps and strains and stress
and marked yourself forever within
the open space of dawn.

I envy you I find
I'd been swallowing all night
and day me

I came out in your crawl space.

You were waiting in the hall
to sweep me off my feet barely

Consummatum Est while I

plied the throbbing temple,

remembering my head and thought

There was no moonlight.

I didn't expect as much the weight

as a pretense to discover some moonlight

in that 60-watt room, head split

or music in the background the

instead of TV before my eyes

could adjust and then your hands,

wherever they were, and mine fondling

the remote and the edge of my glass

until a break. 60-watt room

Time to fill with something

sour and cheap that ed at dark

burned going in and you said,

"smooth." nowhere in the heavens,

In the bathroom I flushed twice

or more, and poked my finger hard

into a temple until it hurt, just so

I knew I could still feel girl,

despite the sums of sour junk

I'd been swallowing all night

and days before. give nothing

I came out.

You were waiting in the hall

to sweep me off my feet barely

five steps to the bed while I
plied the throbbing temple,
remembering my head and thought
it could save me.

(has shortened herself to Doe)

I had no prayer beneath the weight
of all that had been done.
The earth pounded, my head split
and open wide poured out all the
moonlight I'd been seeking.

and in this a blackness burned

You fell quickly into sleep,
snorting and self-satisfied.

I turned off the 60-watt room
and fell too near you.

But as I lay and looked at dark

I knew there was yet moonlight
shining somewhere in the heavens,
on earth, in the trembling temple
of my mind. I knew that I could
lie awake all night and think
on it and still, like a schoolgirl,
wonder where it was.

Now, when all have gone to sleep,

Doe lays the breakfast table.

In the morning she burns the toast

and smothers herself in dishes.

Her hands dry up and crack

while the Schult behind her bellows

Imitating art he cannot find.

They go round and round, she breaks

to find the tie he needs and

Deanna Wolf Schult's mess

(has shortened herself to Dee)

once made her black pottery

when all had gone to sleep. lit in pose

In the hollows of the night

she smothered her work in dung

so it could not breathe in fire,

and in this a blackness burned

into the tender flesh of clay. yes,

peer through the dark, mouth

She polished with rounded stone curtain

the hardness she created and

with a brilliant, prowling knife

clawed out the ancient image

of dancing Navajo Clay Women

until her fingers ached,

until she faltered over breakfast,

couldn't hold the coffee pot,

dropped the dirty Corningware,

and shattered in the kitchen.

Now, when all have gone to sleep,

Dee lays the breakfast table.

In the morning she burns the toast

and smothers herself in dishes.

Her hands dry up and crack

while the Schult behind her bellows

about the tie he cannot find.

They go round and round, she breaks
to find the tie he needs and
smooths the morning's mess.

The potter's wheel is still.

The Clay Women are caught in pose
on dirty studio shelves.

But one day without the Schult
the Wolf will claw out.
She will, with bright, keen eyes,
peer through the dark,
the carved and hardened Clay Woman
will prowl in the night,
will dance again.

Where the night before I on the edge
with arms reaching out
to the folds of shadow
and creases of light
coming from without,
where the night before I did lie
with my fingers prolonged
to fold the creases of light
with shadow
and the silence
of those extremities.

Daybed

I've smoothed the sheets,
propped the pillows,
set up quite well
against the frame.

The bed all nicely made
to order,
made up for morning,
made to lie all fixed all day.

A crease, still there, I see
writhing in the middle
where the night before lay heavy
the folds of shadow
between us.

Where the night before I on the edge
with arms reaching out
to the folds of shadow
and creases of light
coming from without,
where the night before I did lie
with my fingers prolonged
to fold the creases of light
with shadow
and the silence
of these extremities.

Accounting

My mother wants to wash her hair,
while her husband drinks his coffee,
and, balancing his books, asks her to add
two numbers,
a double check.

I can always count on that, she says,
when I want to wash my hair.

My mother wants to weed her garden,
while her husband picks out errors,
and, finding a couple, asks her to look for
the problem,
an uncertainty.

I can be sure of that, she says,
when I want to weed my garden.

My mother wants to walk away,
while her husband lays out columns
and, arranging duplicates, asks her to
take a set,
just a second.

I guess that figures, she says,
when I want to walk away.

So she adds two numbers
and then divides and discovers
a deficit,

no compensation,
while her husband asks her to try again
until their answers come out the same.

"Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky..."
I said though I kept my distance,

I'd rather not, Mr. Eliot, walk with you tonight.
The yellow fog is rubbing its tongue
on the people we meet, lingering on the roofs
of mouths, licking lips, ready to speak
in sickly, jaundiced repeats,
"How old she's gotten, and no children yet.
This man might do for her."
I'd rather be taken by this soaking fog.
There's enough of tongues lashing about
and I have but 10 minutes to be
10 minutes away
from the ugly words you're about to say.

I'm no Ophelia, to die for lack of love.
I will not be distracted by the scent of men,
to bathe in it, to be surely drowned
out by the deep voices of promise and madness.
I'd rather walk the beach alone thinking
of Botticelli and the mermaids men invent.

It is fine for me to come, and go, and grow
old. I hate your solemn face,
and you so suited in this yellowed haze,
your collar up, your trousers rolled,

Love Song
in places as I have left,
talking of Michelangelo and toast and tea.

"Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky..."
And though I am a woman,

I'd rather not, Mr. Eliot, walk with you tonight.
The yellow fog is rubbing its tongue
on the people we meet, lingering on the roofs
of mouths, licking lips, ready to speak
in sickly, jaundiced repeats,
"How old she's gotten, and no children yet.
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out by the deep voices of promise and madness.
I'd rather walk the beach alone thinking
of Botticelli and the mermaids men invent.

It is fine for me to come, and go, and grow
old. I hate your solemn face,
and you so suited in this yellowed haze,
your collar up, your trousers rolled,

going to such places as I have left,
talking of Michelangelo and toast and tea.

No, Mr. Eliot, I'd rather not
walk with you tonight.
And though I am a woman,
do not then presume
that is not what I meant,
that is not it, at all.

led with heavy sighs and
the smallest talk before you
on your mark get set and go
in the swish and hush of dawn.

For the finale, a march up the stairs
in evening, I ready for the leaps
that let us pass a little flesh
and spoon each other rounds
before we cough and fall asleep.
We run for covers, you and I,
measured beneath fat darkness
and dissonant scores.
You and I, quickly countering
like the 4-minute mile lest we
in the split of seconds pause
and see ourselves
disqualified.

Each night, and every dawn, we find we
never cross the finished line.

Assimile the morning comes,
the steaming coffee is dashed with cream,
we split what I alone have made

The morning comes e than I take
in a cracked house, each day
the checks and imbalances,
stirring up excuses over
the sizzling pan that builds
the breakfast we split, a quick fixed
ladled with heavy sighs and
the smallest talk before you
on your mark get set and go
in the swish and hush of dawn.

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in evening, I ready for the leaps
that let us pass a little flesh
and spoon each other rounds
before we cough and fall asleep.
We run for covers, you and I,
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and dissonant scores.
You and I, quickly countering
like the 4-minute mile lest we
in the split of seconds pause
and see ourselves
disqualified.

Each night, and every dawn, we find we
never cross the finished line.

Again, the morning comes,
the steaming coffee is dashed with cream,
we split what I alone have made
as I dish out more than I take
and watch you feed.

long days tied down,
bound to come undone.

A man, coming home,
loosens his blue collar,
puts his day on the rocks,
and is by night quite stoned.

The hum-drums beat out of them
a certain pacing:

The curtains always open to let
day in, day out;

the T.V. lighting the room in blues;
and the baby, like a slight of hand,
disappearing to bed

when Father sees his glass half-empty,
and Mother tucks in loose ends.

They bought a home, filled it with family and fresh flowers
by 30.

And sometimes, in the still darkness,
she reaches out to the smell of spent liquor
and sweat.

She moves him.

Through the night she moves him.
And for that he gives her his hand,
a four-room house,

Almost 30 flowers
day in, day out.

A four-room house.

A woman, long hair tied up,
long days tied down,
bound to come undone.

A man, coming home,
loosens his blue collar,
puts his day on the rocks,
and is by night quite stoned.

The hum-drums beat out of them
a certain pacing:

The curtains always open to let
day in, day out;

the T.V. lighting the room in blues;
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They bought a home, filled it with family and fresh flowers
by 30.

And sometimes, in the still darkness,
she reaches out to the smell of spent liquor
and sweat.

She moves him.

Through the night she moves him.

And for that he gives her his hand,
a four-room house,

and cut flowers the Absurd

day in, day out.

Act I: she likes him

and his vulgar tongue.

Beckett was right

(her mother was wrong)—

good things do not come

to those who wait.

So the skinny blonde gives

him 20 eyelashes batting

like cardiac arrest

and in return she wins

her first older man.

I'm watching with my sacked lunch

for someone to make a scene.

And here she is,

premenstrual and posthaste,

spewing 20th-century angst

right here in the cafeteria.

The vulgar tongue belonged to her

before she was upstaged

by an act of blonde.

"We're over!" she proclaims

as though he hadn't decided yet

and she exits staged right,

lots of convincing flurry

like she's played it before

and earns a standing ovation.

The Theatre of the Absurd

she's (in progress) for her age:

Act II: a tortured poet

Act I: she likes him

and his vulgar tongue.

Beckett was right

(her mother was wrong)--

good things do not come

to those who wait.

So the skinny blonde gives

him 20 eyelashes batting

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"We're over!" she proclaims

as though he hadn't decided yet

and she exits staged right,

lots of convincing flurry

like she's played it before

and earns a standing vocation:

the slighted female,
she's synonymous for her age.

Act II: a tortured poet
anguishing over black coffee
and black clothes,
pining in premeditated raptures for a word
that rhymes with "spontaneous."
In a near-breadth experience
I piqueing over her shoulders
suggest "extraneous"
and am shooed for getting too close.
She snags her papers away
and [with indignation] storms out
thinking so hard about being,
and nothingness--
a dialogue of the mind in itself,
for which I congratulate her.

Act III:
The author calls for rewrite.
[Brief pause]
I huddle over my lunch and
wonder if these kinetic women
have forgotten their lines,
that they are the daughters
of Astoreth and Astarte,
that the Minoans and the Sumerians
revered the womb and the breast
and believed a woman's blood

divine proof of immortality.

These days I imagine to find
miracles leaning against lampposts

and powdering their noses

in Walmart mirrors. Absurd.

Especially at lunchtime.

Maybe Isis never hungered

for lowfat food and respite.

a subtly synthesized strain of melody

And so I ate a banana.

Monkey see, monkey make due.

switching off and on, off and on,

and overloaded the strength of the

current we share. I wait above the bar

for the music to begin.

Ruth downstairs is laughing, that

sharp, high-pitched drunken laugh

she gets about this time of night.

What'll go on in the dark, she jokes,

every time this happens. Her voice

is filled with intonations;

she'd like Tommy the burned-out cop

to play, to turn on to her, like men

did when she was drunk and young.

I listen to the silence; at last

she conducts some attention,

a deep and cadent voice I've never heard

though I've lived upstairs for years

sings out above the monotonous din

"I go on in the dark, Ruthie" and

Concurrent

Such gentle music is playing,
"Inner Voice," the music called
New Age, and I never thought I'd like
such intonations, such resounding
rhythms, over and over just beneath
a subtly synthesized strain of melody
until the power goes out;
Ruth downstairs has blown another fuse,
switching off and on, off and on,
and overloaded the strength of the
current we share. I wait above the bar
for the music to begin.

Ruth downstairs is laughing, that
sharp, high-pitched drunken laugh
she gets about this time of night.
What'll go on in the dark, she jokes,
every time this happens. Her voice
is filled with intonations;
she'd like Tommy the burned-out cop
to play, to turn on to her, like men
did when she was drunk and young.
I listen to the silence; at last
she conducts some attention,
a deep and cadent voice I've never heard
though I've lived upstairs for years
sings out above the monotonous din
"I go on in the dark, Ruthie" and

Marilyn, the scatchy waitress, chimes,

"Want me to hold off the breakers?"

I can almost feel Ruth's energy and the

excitement, I feel wired for a moment,

and then I wonder how long he'll come on,

go off, go out, and she'll be back

flipping all the switches.

The power goes on. *called I am*

"Inner Voice" starts up again.

New Age it's called, with such resounding

rhythms, over and over, and I never thought

I'd like it.

I've crossed you

and known the way

and had it

out out out

with you.

Too many black mornings

I've watched the April fog that lifts

itself and ascends like salvation

to the rising sun.

What will be done on earth.

I am the resurrection and the life.

Whosoever believes in me shall not perish

but have life.

This

is the last

Easter Uprising 1994

Its source has been

I am the resurrection and the life.

Take, this is my body,

which is broken for you.

But remember

that each time I get nailed I am

judging

one of us

will be saved.

I've crossed you

and known the way

and had it

out out out

with you.

Too many black mornings

I've watched the April fog that lifts

itself and ascends like salvation

to the rising sun.

What will be done on earth.

I am the resurrection and the life.

Whosoever believes in me shall not perish

but have life.

This

is the last

of my blood. at the Five & Dime

Its source has been

and ever shall be polish--

damned. Collect, too high, Sparkle, gone--

and a better offer, like--

a two-for-one on Clean Start now

that's a bright idea, she thinks,

keeping something to herself.

Rea had promised once

the second child came,

his little gem would have

a little fun--

ages ago, when she was raw,

Friskey nights at Long Shot's,

and afternoons embedded--

but she got a better offer,

a two-for-one on children,

the twins, the diapers, and dishtowels

soaked up all her time.

A two-pack is the cheapest, still

I'll have no change, she sighs.

She passes in the lipstick aisle--

Jaded Jewel, Marooned Rhine, Ruby...

Ruby, Ruby, that's his calling,

Ruby--

time to pay up, girl,

you got everything you need

Ron & Ruby at the Five & Dime

Ok, ok, I'll leave the Jewel here, Ron,
is Ruby's calling back.

Ruby needs some polish--

Ruby, Comet, too high, Sparkle, gone--
and a better offer, like
a two-for-one on Clean Start now
that's a bright idea, she thinks,
keeping something to herself.

Ron had promised once
the second child came,
his little gem would have
a little fun--

ages ago, when she was raw,
Friday nights at Long Shot's,
and afternoons embedded--
but she got a better offer,
a two-for-one on children,
the twins, the diapers, and dishtowels
soaked up all her time.

A two-pack is the cheapest, still
I'll have no change, she sighs.
She passes in the lipstick aisle--

Jaded Jewel, Marooned Rhine, Ruby...
Ruby, Ruby, that's his calling,
Ruby--
time to pay up, girl,
you got everything you need

and then some. Across the city of empty windows

Ok, ok, I'll leave the Jewel here, Ron,
is Ruby's calling back.

She never walked away from a fight or rescue

Ruby, mined and worn out limped,

on semi-precious occasions, a pain in her shoulder

a little gem, a way to the back of her mind

hardened by the ages, the children

kept on hand terrified than she-- a woman

on knee a comfort was becoming alien--

and back 'd sometimes dream instead

expecting more labor. a regret that

that they'd just run

so fast until they blended with air

and she could breathe them, smell them,

take them back into her body--

and she'd blow them into white balloons

to wait for a wind). a regret that

that she'd never met the father

Lots of nights he'd storm out afterwards

(and she'd dream of his death--

his tool would cut him,

suck him into the vents and batter him

in the fan until he went to pieces--

that would spew out with monoxide

from the muffler like dirty thunder

and make people cough and hold their breath

and he would be

exhausted)

and she was glad, gladder still if he came home drunk

How She Comes Across

she consumed herself,

getting smashed a second time

She never walked away from a fight

(usually she crawled, or limped,

or lay on the floor until the pain

dragged its way to the back of her mind

and she remembered the children

were more terrified than she--

though comfort was becoming alien--

and she'd sometimes dream instead

lying there fetal

that they'd just run

so fast until they blended with air

and she could breathe them, smell them,

take them back into her body

and she'd blow them into white balloons

to wait for a wind).

Lots of nights he'd storm out afterwards

(and she'd dream of his death

his 4x4 would eat him,

suck him into the vents and batter him

in the fan until he went to pieces

that would spew out with monoxide

from the muffler like dirty thunder

and make people cough and hold their breath

and he would be

exhausted)

and she was glad, gladder still if he came home drunk

(so he wouldn't see the liter of empty security
she consumed herself,
getting smashed a second time
surely beat banging her head against reason
and sighing why why why
until her lungs flushed themselves of questions
and there was nothing left to do but heave)

or came home not at all. "What a wreck
(she'd think, what a wreck,
and how'd I get here? Wanted out
of high school, wanted to get out
from under Daddy,
and if I'm gonna be knocked up
it'll sure as hell be my choice
where I get banged and who does it)

would do for me, just one wreck
(she'd think each time she heard
the heavy wheels of a
4-ton weight rolling into the driveway
and shudder "it's him")

and I'd be free. Get the kids to Aunt Stell's
(who tried to tell her, years ago,
that she had a brain, could leave
an impression on the world and shouldn't
rush to set up a house,
rush to start a family
with a man she met drag stripping

on the backroads. The only time
she ever beat him)

who'd be a better mother anyway
and I'd punch myself out."

Just one little wreck
of a life.

One night
she packaged her bundle of children
and delivered them all from evil.

She punched out

(as she dreamt)

and got smashed

(as she dreamt)

"Mother of 3 killed,

(of white balloons and wind)

driving under the influence

(of dirty thunder and exhaust)

and dangerous conditions

a factor."

and I am

waiting for Mr. Right

whom no one has ever seen

yet I have talked to him

though I keep a sword on my tongue

because the alien Mr. Rights

keep sending probes,

keep coming back

Mad Women on the Outside

Margaret is crazy
everybody says
she sleeps in her car
with a sword under her seat
because the aliens are coming back
and she doesn't want a vaginal probe
without a fight on her hands
and on her mind
the stabbing pains
made their point to her
once is enough
and Chrissy talks to her dead hamster
Josephine who comes back
to warn her of secret invasions
when an object gets too close
tries to enter her guarded place
and tells her it's time to pull out
everybody says Chrissy is crazy too
and I am
waiting for Mr. Right
whom no one has ever seen
yet I have talked to him
though I keep a sword on my tongue
because the alien Mr. Rights
keep sending probes,
keep coming back

for invasions.

How crazy it seems
on the outside,
believing in invisible things,
but I see women
do that.

Karen who owns the bookstore
where we all converge
like a pantheon of outgrown goddesses
to take advantage of her patience and prices
believes in human kindness
that it comes threefold back
to those who give it freely
and Polly believes in ascension through wisdom
so everyday she rises
comes to the store to tell us
and falls into traps
set by Higher Learning
and Susan believes in nurturing the weak
who suckle her strength
and keep coming back
to absorb her.
Insane.

There must be an institution
where we could all be kept
quiet--patriarchy I think--
where we could spend a thousand years
trying to work our way out

of these problems--
the fears, the invasions,
the wisdom of our own
(though some say patriarchy
is all in our minds,
is invisible,
like our beliefs,
like we are
once inside).

It would be our second coming out
if we found salvation there
if we were healed
or just given leave
to be mad
on the outside.

Coming to Terms

To Jill

My shrink didn't blame you

she simply said you

“enable me”

in many ways

make me neurotic

make me compulsive

make me compensate

it's tremendous power

she gave you

you are my persuasion

but you have need she said

“to let go”

Mommy's little girl

is as old as you

and can't can't be happy

until we both admit that

in taking first steps

all over again

only I can raise me

only you can let me

as I am

“and be free.”

From now on, we said,

it was all in our minds.

about the long days we got those

So I sent you cards

on Valentine's Day

St. Valentine's Day cards"

To Jill sent me "To Jo."

We wrote "love" and "always."

All this made up

We were always the two

who got the cheap cards

from class nerds. We'd

haggle the night before

over which boys would

get some of our best. dotted

It ended in disappointment

every year, when Erich only

signed his name without

"love," and we'd scan our

cards in the bathroom later

for some slip of the pen,

a firmly dotted "i" that

meant more than "i" could.

And we'd watch as Patric

laughed in the background

at the cards we gave to him.

getting "love" and "always."

We learned to dream instead.

Valentine's Day, 4th grade.

Meant more than it should.

From now on, we said, my spirits did,

it was all in our minds. a while

about the lump rose you got from Ed

So I sent you cards got from stress

on Valentine's Day Day.

and signed them "Ricardo"
and you sent me "Teio."
We wrote "love" and "always."
All this made up
for everything else.

I never told you, but
Teio was perfect. He sent me
notes on lovely paper, and
always made a firmly dotted
"i." And Ricardo doted on
you, used multicolored pens
and wrote "Jill" like he meant it.

Even though we made believe,
gave it our very best,
Ricardo disappeared and
Teio found someone else.

We got a little older,
we dreamed a little less.
We signed off and stopped
getting "love" and "always."

You got married and pregnant;
I conceived of neither.
Your uterus dropped, my spirits did,
and we laughed once in a while
about the limp rose you got from Ed
and the stiff neck I got from stress
on St. Valentine's Day.

In this last February,
I got medication and you got
nothing. I called on you
but it was too late. I woke
up your house. One child
screamed in your background.
We'd get back to each other,
we swore,
and we didn't.

April has come.
Flower shops are a blooming
business and I'm sick.
Everyone acts like sunshine.
You're expecting a baby and
I'm expecting the worst.

Next year I'm dreaming again
I'll send you some of my best,
tell you that "always" is a given,
that the "i" is firm and means
more than it ever did.
And we'll laugh this time,
as two children
rejoicing in the background.

Suspension metaphors.

When the ferry

I should have seen it coming.

A tiny body, how striking
when I caught you first
in that little span
chaos bursts in color
I was driven, fluttering
to spread myself
a tiny body
thinking of all the work
to stay afloat
agitation hovering
ready to whip me
if for a moment
I lost sight of time
and time and time again
chaos bursts
I am so driven, fluttering
to spread myself
to be a brilliant woman outside
a tiny body, how striking when I caught you first
I was full in flight and then
smack against the front of me
a butterfly dies
in seconds
flat.

I was struck, so struck by that
for it is not in my nature

to kill my metaphors.

Within the flurry

I should have seen it coming.

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